

Supervisor Pam Slater-Price

# District 3 Slate

February 2010

Third District, County of San Diego



## Slater-Price Delivers State of County *Says It Is 'Time to Run Smart' - Champions Accountability, Fiscal Prudence*

*State of the County Speech is edited for space*

**G**ood evening, and welcome to beautiful Irwin M. Jacobs' Qualcomm Hall. January 3rd marked the 157th year of County government. We have accomplished a lot since the first Board of Supervisors rode to meetings by horseback, coach or wagon. There have been good times and bad but we have always weathered the storm.

At the very center of today's storm is the most difficult economy we have faced in decades. It has forced many companies to change the way they do business, and many households to cut back on spending.

County government has had to make the same changes. That's what I'm here to talk about tonight.

Tonight's State of the County address is just that -- the current state of your county government. I am going to discuss our financial situation and the State impacts on our budget. Then I will discuss what I plan to accomplish for my district and for the region.

I will talk about the good news and bad. And I will be blunt.

I am positive about the future. We live in a beautiful region and we have a wonderful quality of life, which all of us pay a premium to enjoy. We can be thankful to live and work in San Diego County. But to maintain this quality of life, we have much work to do. 2009 was not an easy year. San Diego County lost close to 45,000 jobs. Our unemployment rate is over 10 percent. About 146,000 county residents are out of work.

A slow economy also hits governments hard. Job losses, slow home sales, and reduced sales taxes are like a snow ball rolling downhill. The result is less revenue for county government to provide necessary core services.

During the past two years, the County has processed more than 215,000 property tax re-assessments, with an average lowered property value of \$100,000. Although this helps cash-strapped families during these difficult times, it also results in a corresponding drop in property tax revenue to local governments.

This money is needed to fund the good things we do for San Diego County.

For instance: The County operates 33 libraries and three animal shelters. We provide Sheriff's deputy protection, the Probation Department, the office of the District Attorney, and we run the jails. The County also oversees a massive health and welfare safety net for the poor. We inspect and rate your restaurants for cleanliness and food safety. And we test your beach water for contaminants like e.Coli.

Supervisor Greg Cox led a regional effort to restore our monitoring program after the state dodged its responsibility and eliminated the funding.

We inspect cash registers and sales at your stores to make certain that you are not being cheated.

Over 45,000 acres at 33 parks and open space buffers are maintained by us.

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Flanked by Supervisors and county leaders, Chairwoman Pam Slater-Price delivers the annual address.



Daughter Lauren Slater introduces Chairwoman Pam Slater-Price.

# STATE OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY...

This includes one of the largest multi-species conservation and land protection plans in the country - which this Board of Supervisors put in place. We protect your food supply through inspections of the County's \$1.5 billion agriculture industry.

The County has firefighting helicopters at the ready, and I'd like to thank Supervisor Ron Roberts for taking a leadership role on that issue.

Last year the county spent more than \$33 million to protect your homes from fires. We have a thorough brush-clearing program to significantly reduce the threat. Next month we will complete a Fire Deployment Study at the behest of Supervisor Jacob. This will assess fire services countywide so we can plan ahead as a region. We will continue to build on our good working relationship with CalFire to protect San Diego County from wildfires.

And these are just a few of the good things we do for you.

In the County of San Diego's Operational Plan, our Chief Administrative Officer Walt Ekard promises more of the same. But he warns of further challenges ahead.

That might be an understatement. When revenue is down, this board must cut expenses. But the difference is, the State continues to mandate expensive programs, without providing all the funding, and the Legislature expects counties to make up the difference.

Philosophically, I disagree with those office holders who believe the public demands more programs. I think the public demands honesty. You elect us to balance the budget, not to spend more than we have.

You want us to be direct.

If we don't have the money for new programs, you want us to tell you so. Yet, our state government continues to throw money at all problems in the hopes of solving every societal issue known to mankind. They are draining the taxpayers - and our state - dry.

One wise columnist wrote... if the State were a patient, its face would be pale, its breathing shallow, and its heartbeat would be starting to flat-line. I will not allow county government to lie beside the State on a gurney.

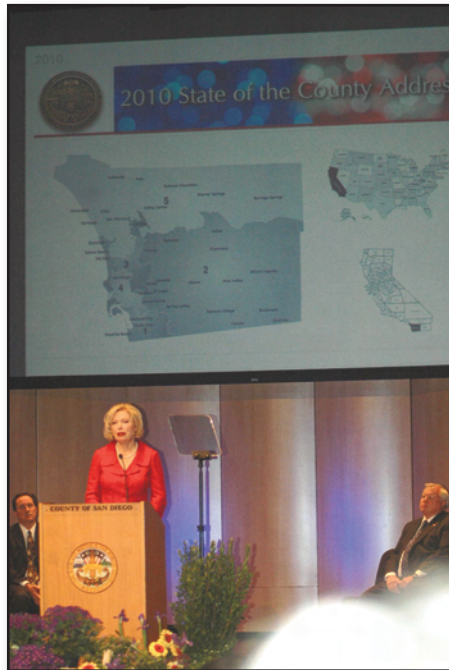
So we will continue to manage better with less until our economy improves.

Thanks to this Board of Supervisors, San Diego County is in a better position than most governments to weather this tough economy. We are experienced and our hands are steady.

Let me give you some examples:

Last November we made the decision to lower costs and maintain services by outsourcing 200 jobs in the County's Health & Human Services Agency. It was a tough decision, and one we did not take lightly. But this move alone will save taxpayers' \$6.8 million.

Since 2004 our workforce has shrunk by 1,500 positions.



Backed by a graphic showing the size of San Diego County, Chairwoman Pam Slater-Price outlines her plan for keeping the region financially strong despite the economic downturn.

During my term as Chairwoman, we will not shy away from making tough decisions when they need to be made. We will have a tight, no-frills budget. We are preparing for harder times because experience tells us we must be prepared.

**I will not allow county government to lie beside the State on a gurney. So we will continue to manage better with less until our economy improves.**

For anyone upset by the cuts, let's remember for a moment that before my colleagues and I were elected to the Board of Supervisors, the county was a fiscal mess. We turned this around. Our County employees worked hard to make this happen.

In 2009 alone, the County received 80 statewide or national awards for innovation and innovative partnerships. Our employees do things you will never read about in newspapers or blogs.

For example, the County Registrar of Voters carries out elections in the region. One creative employee figured out that rather than issue cell phones to volunteer poll workers to communicate with the registrar, why not give them a \$5 stipend to use their own cell phones on election night? You may not think that's a big deal. But that suggestion alone saved the taxpayers \$120,000.

Now let me present a few of my goals.

One: We will balance our budget and manage smart in tough times.

Two: We will continue to provide the best law enforcement we can muster.

And three: The county's libraries, parks,

health programs for kids, and environmental protection will remain top notch.

Let's start by talking about protecting our environment.

Supervisor Dianne Jacob and I recently introduced a public/private partnership that makes solar panels affordable. The program can help you lower the cost of your utility bill and helps us all reduce reliance on fossil fuel generation. Up-front financing is available, and the cost for installation is spread out over a 20-year period, with the payments made through your property tax bills. Additionally the Federal government may soon offer a 30% tax credit. Homeowners and businesses can sign up for this program in June.

Sonoma County implemented a similar program. After just 2,500 installations solar panels now provide 4 percent of their region's power

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demand. I believe we can and will do better.

Your County government also practices what it preaches by saving energy and water in all our buildings. We made 16 energy-reducing changes and cut electrical use by 61 percent, gas use by 21 percent and water use inside the County Administration Center by 42 percent.

In January of last year the County completed the construction of the new San Elijo Lagoon Nature Center using many recycled materials. I suggest taking your entire family there to learn about the history of the area, and then walk the trails of the lagoon, and watch the many birds and other wildlife. I wanted the Nature Center to be an example of environmental stewardship -- and it won the top environmental construction honor -- a Platinum LEED Award for Green Building Standards in energy and environmental design. It too, uses re-cycled water and solar panels.

Another project we're proud of is the David Kreitzer Pedestrian Bridge at Lake Hodges. The County is a member of the San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority that built this bridge last May.

I talk about these projects because I believe the county must set the example for future construction in the region. For instance, in the coming year, we hope to begin planning in the heart of my district for a new San Dieguito River Park Nature Center, one that will inspire our young and attract eco-tourist dollars to the region.

Most of the funds for construction will come from private donations and grants. This center will connect the chain of nature centers up and down the state. The new center, located in Del

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Mar, would overlook the \$90 Million lagoon restoration paid for by Southern California Edison and SDG&E.

Future growth requires housing, but we also need to preserve green spaces. The economy and profit drive construction. But our quality of life demands preservation. And I will always strive to preserve and protect.

In fact, if you didn't know it, the County has one of the largest local parks and open space programs in the country. Our precious environment is an integral part of our lifestyle. Our 18 cities and the county unincorporated area are bound together by open space, lagoons and world-renowned beaches.

It makes perfect sense to preserve and add to what we have. It also makes great economic sense. Green spaces give our homes value.

Our Multiple Species Conservation Program provides green buffers between our communities and sets us apart from Los Angeles. In South County we have set aside nearly 400 square miles for conservation. The North County and East County open space plans are scheduled for a vote this year to increase the protected acreage to more than 1,500 square miles along with an extensive system of public trails.

To put this in perspective, that's larger than the entire State of Rhode Island ... and nearly five times the size of the land mass of the City of San Diego!

As last year's Chairwoman of the San Dieguito River Park I worked for the expansion of the 55-mile park from the beach at Del Mar to Volcan Mountain. We are now working to add hiking and biking trails along the river by the Del Mar Fairgrounds, based upon a plan by Senator Christine Kehoe.

I see this park as a legacy for generations of San Diegans. And as I have said many times before; the San Dieguito River Park is the Yosemite of Southern California!

Along with this ongoing work at the River Park, I plan to expand other county open space assets and designate funds for park improvements. I will support Vice Chairman Bill Horn's efforts to preserve Rancho Guejito, the last remaining unspoiled Mexican Land Grant in California. I want to preserve all 22,000 acres. And I support Vice



Sheriff Bill Gore's command staff attended the State of the County.



Chairwoman Slater-Price discusses a health initiative the County will launch this year.

Chairman Horn's ongoing work on the San Luis Rey River Park.

Supervisor Ron Roberts continues to pursue his vision of a waterfront park on the grounds of the County Administration Center. He is aggressively seeking private funding to help make this long awaited dream a reality. We all support him in this effort.

In my view, open space is the park infrastructure of San Diego County. Without it, our quality of life will decline. But other kinds of infrastructure are just as important.

In a real life story out of CSI, the County put the construction industry to work by funding a new \$70 million Medical Examiner's and Forensic Center - with cash, not credit. This facility - built to LEED Silver environmental standards, by the way - will help our Sheriff and District Attorney to solve crimes, and our health department to track diseases.

We also put the private sector to work building the new, state-of-the-art Edgemoor Hospital for the indigent and elderly. This facility opened last year. It needed replacing and we showed our commitment to the frailest members of our society by doing so.

Libraries are more popular than ever. They are truly the center of our communities.

My plan last year was to expand the Del Mar Library, and now that the task is complete, I am working to do the same for the Cardiff Library. The children's section will more than double in size. All these County projects put people to work using our private construction industry.

San Diego County Libraries and our Health and Human Services Agency share a common mission: to help our citizens enjoy better health, stronger families and improved quality of life. The two partner on caregiver forums, Financial and Elder Abuse Prevention, stopping children's

obesity and adult health. Providing health programs is one of the core missions of the County.

During my term as Chairwoman, the County will launch a new, innovative health strategy. This will include the 3-Four-50 Initiative that emphasizes a good diet, exercise and not smoking. Cigarettes, junk food, and physical inactivity contribute to four of our most chronic diseases - cancer, cardiovascular disease, respiratory illness, and Type 2 diabetes.

Health statistics indicate that these big four are responsible for more than 50 percent of all deaths in San Diego County. If we can change our health habits, quality of life improves for us all. And the health care savings to you as taxpayers are huge.

With a rash of heart-wrenching alcohol-related fatalities not far behind us, I will also ask the county health department to partner in a new education campaign with the Sheriff and our local schools concerning teen drinking and driving.

I know that issue No. 1 on everyone's mind is the economy. However, the County isn't going to solve this problem alone. But we have been proactive in response to what's happening locally. For instance, last month, top economists met at the County's Economic Roundtable to

analyze where our local economy is headed. We are trying to forecast the changes and the bumps in the road,

because that will drive all our planning.

San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders and I will work together this year to explore potential incentives to encourage businesses and jobs to relocate in San Diego from other areas.

As Supervisor Greg Cox said, "In today's economy, we can leave no stone unturned in our efforts to create more jobs and business." But really, the County's role in a recovery is to be business-friendly. And it is imperative that we maintain a financially-solid county government.

If we have set aside the money, we must forge ahead with construction of long-planned public buildings. This is one way to put people to work.

Now is not the time to run scared. It's the time to run smart.

The faltering economy has had an impact on one of the County's core services, public protection. As I mentioned, public safety is my number one concern. Crime is usually up in a down economy, yet we have the lowest crime rate in 25 years. Led by Sheriff Bill Gore, our County Sheriff's Deputies are the finest in the State, second to none.

And our District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis, with her fine team of Deputy DA's, have established a solid record of successful prosecutions. Yet spread sheets show dramatic declines in Proposition 172 funds -- state sales taxes that pay for County law enforcement. In one year the funds have plummeted more than \$30 mil-

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lion. Our finance team projects another \$14 million loss by the end of this fiscal year.

That would be catastrophic. I'd like to hold onto what we've got - keep our deputies on the streets and our courts and jails operating in the black. To do this we will need to get even more creative and continue a strong commitment to work together.

To give you some examples: the Sheriff, and our District Attorney and I formed the Oxy Task Force of San Diego County, a multi-agency group to combat prescription drug abuse, specifically OxyContin. OxyContin is a brand-name prescription of the pain killer oxycodone.

But it kills more than pain.

Teen-agers swallow - snort - smoke - or inject the diluted pills. Most teens say they can steal prescription drugs right from their parent's or a relatives' medicine cabinet. The county Medical Examiner says 51 people died of Oxy-codone-related deaths in 2008 - three times the overdose rate from the previous year. The Task Force aims to reduce illegal access to the pills and increase awareness through policy, education, health and enforcement.

In another new initiative that combines forces to save the taxpayer's money, Supervisor Jacob and I will collaborate to blend elements of our Meth Strike Force with the Oxy Task Force to fight drug abuse head on! If we can stop our kids from taking drugs, we can prevent decades of hardship and misery.

As I mentioned, the county operates three animal shelters. In one we partner with the Humane Society to provide services. Two of the shelters were built on this Board's watch. Like you, I have Zero Tolerance for dog fighting and

animal abuse. This year our D.A. and Sheriff helped County Animal Services achieve several high-level felony convictions for animal abuse, animal fighting and animal hoarding cases. During my chairmanship we will maintain that zero tolerance. In fact, much like traffic school, we will expand a program called Responsible Pet Ownership to

rehabilitate low-level offenders. Abusers are going to learn that animal abuse will not be tolerated.

As you can tell by now, I strongly support transparency in government. The public's right to know is important to me. Supervisor Jacob and I rewrote the Neighborhood Reinvestment Grant program for that reason. You now can go online and see where every dollar from this program is spent in any community. Non-profits like Little League, Kiwanis, or arts organizations and business promotion groups can apply for grants online.

We must now find an easier way for people to voice their opinions online. If an item concerns you, here's a convenient way to express your views: I will bring forward a new "Voice Your Opinion Online" program early this year. I want to hear from you more often, not less.

Our arts and culture organizations provide a major part of the quality of life we all enjoy in San Diego. The arts will lift you up, especially in these difficult times. The arts are also good business. There are over 6,300 jobs in San Diego's cultural sector. Arts and culture generate over \$180 million in direct



spending for this region.

We have a top-rated Opera company and our San Diego Symphony celebrates its 100th anniversary this year. We have dance and music, drama and museums, visual and performing arts galore! The Globe and La Jolla Playhouse regularly send productions to Broadway. 1.6 million tourists visit an arts and cultural venue in San Diego County every year. These tourists spend significantly more than other tourists - an average of \$246 per day. This generates \$394 million for our local economy.

Five million admissions annually can't be wrong! That's why I support the arts. I think of attendance at a concert or a dance performance as an investment in San Diego's economy and an investment in our proud cultural heritage.

There are many good things on the horizon.

We face difficulties. But beyond the storm, the sun shines bright.

Members of the Board of Supervisors no longer ride to work on horseback as they did in 1850. But experience, planning, learning from the past, and thoughtfully looking to

the future have helped us to govern and to do our part to ensure the region's quality of life.

This County government is accountable to you. I am accountable to you. I thank you for the honor of being your County Supervisor, and your Chairwoman for the coming year.

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